

"Old Ink"

As I turn the brass knob on the faded blue door, the smell of printer's ink invades my senses, as it always did when I came here to write my stories. This building has been here a long time; no wonder the hinges scowl and the floor creaks as I walk a past the now idle press. It's Tuesday, and we didn't print the The Traveler-Watchman until the night before publication - a schedule followed since 1871, set by Llewellyn F. Terry, the Long Island Traveler's first owner and editor. I walk upstairs, and yes, those still creak, even the small, bare writers' room creaks as the wind howls through the siding.

Today, the place is empty, a shell of its former self. The old building stands even further faded away than I remember when Mr. Kontokosta invited me for the reporter's job back in 2002. This paper printed a lot more than the four pages of the original Watchman, and it even included a magazine style insert each week proclaiming the wonders of the North Fork.

As I walk around upstairs, there, on a rattan table lies a clue to the ancestry of The Traveler and The Watchman newspapers. It's a copy of the 1889 edition of the Long Island Traveler, edited by Mr. J. N. Hallock, who was both Editor and Proprietor, as he proclaimed himself. He called the paper 'A Newspaper for The Family' and printed that on the masthead. It was only four pages in length as it had always been, even before Martin Van Dusen's ownership as of July 8, 1875.

But the Long Island Farmer was truly the first Southold newspaper even though it began in Hempstead. The Farmer was printed in 1824. It was followed by the Republican Watchman which appeared in 1826 and was printed by Samuel Phillip in Sag Harbor. On December 5, 1858 it was sold and moved to Greenport. It was rumored that the new editor/owner of the Watchman, a Henry A. Reeves, was arrested for his loyalties to the South. Somewhere along the way, in the late 1920s, the Watchman joined with the Mattituck Reporter under the ownership by several Wickhams and a James Rambo. In 1940 Fred C. Hawkins bought the two papers and hence the new name of Traveler-Watchman.

Somewhere around the late 1990's Mr. M. Kontokosta bought the paper that I used to write for. That paper has long since disappeared, existing only as a smidgen of ink in a small column of the South Shore Independent. But the newspaper tradition of Southold lives on in the Suffolk Times which was first printed in 1856 and is still being printed today.

As I leave this old and well-worn building I look up and see the faded name of the building as it still exists on a street of the same name. I can only hope it might be refurbished and live on in a new life.

Written by Joel Reitman, who actually worked for the Traveler Watchman